

# FOCUS

# VA

RALPH H. JOHNSON MEDICAL CENTER

[www.charleston.va.gov](http://www.charleston.va.gov)

Spring 2012

A photograph of a woman with short dark hair, smiling and holding a small, fluffy, light-colored dog. She is wearing a dark blue jacket with white stripes on the sleeves. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a tree trunk.

## Her Voice, Her Purpose

*HIV can strike anyone,  
but this Veteran mom  
finds meaning in her status*

**USS Ralph Johnson**  
*New Navy destroyer named  
in honor of VA namesake*

**VCS Canteen and  
Retail Store Open**  
*Patrons give rave reviews*



## director's letter



It's been a busy and exciting beginning to 2012 at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. In our last issue of *Focus VA* we celebrated the opening of the Veterans Enrichment Center. And in this issue we are celebrating again with the debut of our newly remodeled VCS canteen and retail store. We are thrilled to bring these improvements to our environment along with healthier food choices – check out the made-to-order salad bar in the canteen – and better shopping experiences for our Veterans, visitors, volunteers and staff.

We are also celebrating the U.S. Navy's announcement that a new Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer will be named the USS Ralph Johnson to commemorate our namesake's heroism in Vietnam. Actually, we had the honor of sharing the news first with Ralph's sister and her response was so humbling. Through her tears of joy

she thanked the VA and all the Veterans and others in our community that worked to keep Ralph's memory alive. She remembered the Veteran that came to her door several years ago seeking the family's permission to move Ralph's body to Beaufort National Cemetery, and the post in Ladson that worked tirelessly for three years to gain Congressional approval to rename our VA in his honor. It only seems fitting now that a Navy vessel be named for Ralph with the hope that future generations will learn of his legacy and selfless sacrifice for our country.

You will also meet Monique Howell in this issue – a Veteran and mother who is living successfully with HIV and working to educate others about the disease. Diagnosed at the same time she learned she was expecting her third child, her story is sure to inform and inspire us all.

Welcome Home 2012 is just around the corner. Make sure to join us on May 17 aboard the USS Yorktown as we host our 5th annual job and health fair for all Veterans. And if you want to help or support Welcome Home, just let us know. I hope you will enjoy this issue of *Focus VA*, and I thank you for the opportunity to provide the best care anywhere for our nation's heroes.

Sincerely,

Scott R. Isaacks  
Acting Director



### on the cover

*Veteran Monique Howell learned she was HIV positive when she was pregnant with her third child. Today she has three healthy boys and she's found her purpose educating others about living successfully with the disease.*



109 Bee St.  
Charleston, SC 29401  
[www.charleston.va.gov](http://www.charleston.va.gov)

1-888-878-6884  
(843) 577-5011

**Director**  
Carolyn L. Adams

**Associate Director**  
Scott R. Isaacks

**Assistant Director**  
Himanshu Singh, MD

**Chief of Staff**  
Florence Hutchison, MD

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Nursing Service**  
Mary C. Fraggos, RN, MS, CNA, BC



**Editor and Public Affairs Officer**  
Tonya C. Lobbetael

*Focus VA* is a quarterly publication designed for Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center stakeholders. Its purpose is to inform, educate, entertain and generate new ideas. An official publication, *Focus VA* is printed using appropriated funds in compliance with federal regulations. Contents of *Focus VA* are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Health Administration or the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. To contact the editor, email [charlestonpao@va.gov](mailto:charlestonpao@va.gov)

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# VCS STORE OPENS *to Rave Reviews*



Photo by Chris Baroody

*The newly renovated VCS Retail Store features improved space, shopping experience.*

**By Tonya C. Lobbestael, Public Affairs Officer**

A modern, expanded Veterans Canteen Service store featuring wider aisles, improved merchandise displays, and a more convenient shopping experience opened its doors to a capacity crowd and rave reviews on Dec. 2 on the first floor of the VAMC.

The new store, which is located adjacent to the Credit Union, includes several amenities such as a Grab 'N Go that offers fresh fruit, sandwiches, yogurt parfaits and other healthy choices. The store also includes improved lighting, laminate wood floors, and showcase windows in the main hallway to tempt shoppers. And it is handicap accessible.

"This is great!" said Veteran and Shopper Dennis Brown. "We can get around now. There's plenty of room for my chair."

Holiday shoppers flooded the store as soon as the ribbon was cut, finding deals on everything from 3-D televisions to iPad accessories to toys.

"You can really see everything," Dietetic Service's Vivian Moore said of the new merchandise displays. "It really makes you want to spend."





# REMODELED CANTEEN

## OFFERS BETTER ACCESS, HEALTHIER CHOICES

*The remodeled Canteen features modern, handicap accessible seating and healthier choices for patrons.*

**By Kevin S. Abel, Public Affairs Specialist**

The curtain rose on the VCS Canteen's remodeled space Feb. 24 revealing modern furnishings, updated food service areas, and better handicap access for its patrons. A ribbon cutting was held with applause following as the capacity crowd saw the remodeled space for the first time.

Construction to remodel the dining space and food service lines in the Canteen began on Dec. 19. The \$349,000 project includes 102 seating spaces, many of which are more handicap accessible, new furnishings, a new serving line and equipment, and improved lighting throughout. Seating is located in the former VCS Retail Store, allowing the VAMC to recoup the Carolina Room for other uses.

The Canteen features tile and wood grain finishes, comfortable tables and chairs, modern lighting, tile and decorative glass throughout. A made-to-order salad bar and rotisserie have also been added offering healthier choices for patrons.

"I am so excited to see all the vegetables," said VAMC Dietitian Mary Walker. "Look at that salad bar. It's wonderful!"

"This is one of the best Canteens in the entire VA," added VCS Regional Manager Ty Wallace who came to Charleston for the event.

VAMC Acting Director Scott Isaacks says the remodeled Canteen ties into the Medical Center's commitment to expand employee wellness and improve the environment for staff and Veterans.

"We have listened to our staff. They have asked for better healthy food choices and that's what they will find here," said Isaacks. "We also heard our Veterans and have expanded handicap seating to meet their needs. We are thrilled we have been able to make this new Canteen a reality and we hope everyone will enjoy it."

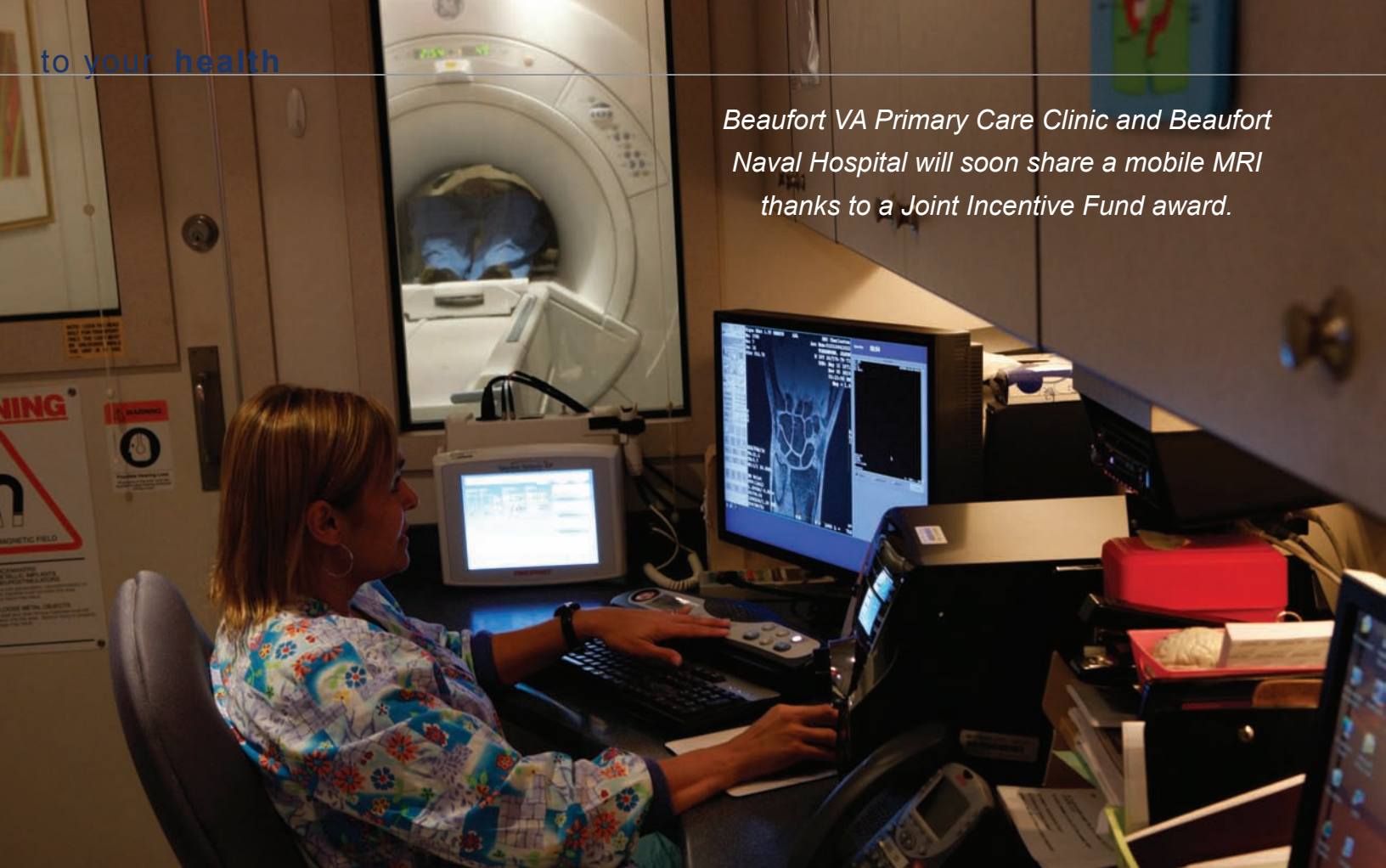
**Photos By Chris Baroody**



*Canteen Assistant Chief Brian Huggins prepares for the newly remodeled Canteen opening.*



*Beaufort VA Primary Care Clinic and Beaufort Naval Hospital will soon share a mobile MRI thanks to a Joint Incentive Fund award.*



# Lowcountry VA-DoD Partners Receive Two Joint Incentive Funds Awards

*Mobile MRI for Beaufort VA and Navy Clinics; Ophthalmology added at Joint Optometry Clinic*

**By Tonya C. Lobbestael, Public Affairs Officer**

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and Department of Defense partners will receive \$2,274,000 to purchase a mobile MRI to be located at Naval Hospital Beaufort, and \$372,000 for a joint venture that adds ophthalmology specialty services at the VA-DoD Optometry Clinic at Joint Base Charleston-Weapons through the federal government's Joint Incentive Fund (JIF).

The mobile MRI brings this diagnostic capability to Naval Hospital Beaufort and the VA clinic located there for the first time. The addition of this equipment means patients will soon be able to receive state-of-the-art imaging at the same location where they receive their primary care. The unit

will be co-operated and co-managed by VA and Naval Hospital Beaufort staff to provide imaging studies for Veterans, active duty service members, and DoD beneficiaries.

The addition of ophthalmology services at the VA-DoD Optometry Clinic means patients who would have been sent to another clinic will now be able to receive that specialty care in the same location where their optometrist is located. The funds will also add new equipment to the clinic which was opened earlier this year on Joint Base Charleston-Weapons as a JIF project between Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, Naval Health Clinic Charleston, and 628th Medical Group. The clinic, which is staffed by VAMC

staff, provides eye services to Veterans, retired, active duty and dependent patients through resource sharing agreements with DoD partners.

"In Beaufort and in Charleston VA enjoys a strong partnership with our DoD health care organizations that benefits our Veterans and service members while providing improved seamless transition from active duty to Veteran status for our patients," said Ralph H. Johnson VAMC Acting Director Scott Isaacks. "These JIF awards recognize the importance of access for all of our patients to the best imaging tools and eye care, and the strength of our ongoing partnership in this area."

# U.S. NAVY DESTROYER

*A new Arleigh Burke class  
guided-missile destroyer will bear  
the name USS Ralph Johnson.*



Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class James Evans

## TO BE NAMED FOR PFC. RALPH H. JOHNSON

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus announced Feb. 15 that a new Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer will be named the USS Ralph Johnson in recognition of the Charleston native's sacrifice while serving with the U.S. Marines in Vietnam.

Pfc. Ralph H. Johnson was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for throwing himself on a grenade after shouting a warning to his fellow Marines. His actions saved the life of platoon leader Lt. Clebe McClary, who resides in Pawley's Island, and prevented the enemy from penetrating his sector of the patrol's perimeter in the Quan Duc Valley in Vietnam.

"Ralph would be so honored," said his sister Helen Richards upon hearing the news. "I am so thankful for all the VA has done to keep his memory alive, and I cannot express what this means to me and my family." Richards continues Ralph's commitment to service by volunteering each week at the VAMC.

"It is an honor to walk through this VA's doors every day

and know that we have the privilege of bearing the name of a true American hero," said Scott Isaacks, acting director of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. "We at the VA strive to honor our nation's heroes each day and we are so pleased to see Ralph's legacy will continue to be shared with current and future generations." The Charleston VA was renamed the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center with a formal dedication on Sept. 5, 1991.

The USS Ralph Johnson is one of the next five ships to be built by the U.S. Navy, according to Secretary Mabus' announcement. Two other destroyers, the USS John Finn and the USS Rafael Peralta, will join the fleet along with two littoral combat ships, the USS Sioux City and the USS Omaha.

The destroyers were named for Navy and Marine Corps heroes whose actions occurred during different conflicts which spanned several decades, but were united in their uncommon valor. The littoral combat ships were named after two American communities.



# A Woman *with Purpose*



“HIV does not define who I am. It is just an unfortunate part of me. I am a woman with a purpose in my life.”

— Monique Howell



By Tonya C. Lobbetael, Public Affairs Officer, Photos by Kevin S. Abel

When Monique Howell went to the doctor to see if she was expecting her third child she was busy wondering if she would have a girl this time. When she got the results she suddenly found herself wondering if she would live long enough to see her child grow up.

Howell found out she was HIV positive at the same time she learned she was pregnant.

"I was shocked," the 30-year-old Army Veteran said. "I thought about my boys and my unborn child. HIV? I thought, how?"

She quickly learned she had been infected by her now ex-husband.

Women make up one-quarter of Americans diagnosed with HIV. Most are infected through heterosexual contact.

"HIV happens to anyone," said Howell.

As she felt her world fall apart, she focused on her unborn child and her two sons. She hated the medications she had to take and their side effects.

Howell was still on active duty and although she had informed her immediate superiors of her status she struggled with the fine line of needing to make her status known and wanting to be treated like a normal person.

"One of the hardest things was knowing how to tell anybody I have HIV," she remembered.

Eventually she left active duty and as her struggle continued she fell into major suicidal depression that led to four inpatient stays at the VA.

"I realized the last time I was in the hospital that I had to get it together," she said.

And true to form Howell took a bold step to do just that.

The next Sunday she walked up to the pulpit in the church her father pastors in Holly Hill, SC and revealed her status to the congregation.

"I was bold," she laughed. "I did not know about HIV stigma. I just knew I needed prayer." Thankfully her church family surrounded her with love and support, and that helped her find her will to live.

## The Treatment Plan

Howell considers herself lucky to be a Veteran saying she gets the very best care for HIV at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. She enrolled with VA in 2007 and received all her benefits including excellent medical treatment, the full spectrum of medications to keep her healthy, and the latest educational information on her disease from top-notch specialists.

"It's just been a blessing. Dr. Church (Infectious Disease Specialist) is so good to take time with me and make sure I understand everything about my status and what to do to take care of myself and my family," she said. She also appreciates that the entire staff protects her privacy and treats her just like any other patient.

While she admits she was not the easiest or most compliant patient when she was first diagnosed, Howell now understands the need to take her medications every day.

"My meds keep me healthy," she said. "Besides, how many people with cancer or high blood pressure have to take their pills every day?"



Daily medications are vital to controlling Monique's HIV.



Monique loves helping her boys with their homework. Five-year-old Moneai (right) learns to read as big brother Danko looks on.

## Family Life

Howell has also educated her boys, now ages 10, 7 and 5 years, on HIV. Her youngest son who she was carrying when she learned she was infected thankfully was born HIV negative.

"They know not to touch me if I am bleeding," she says. They also keep separate medical supplies to keep everyone safe.

As she worked to pull her life back together, Howell again found joy in being a mom and in her many friends. But she really didn't think she would have another romantic relationship.

That is, until Steven.

Several months after they met he finally convinced her to go on a date. Howell knew she would have to tell him her status.

"I didn't know how he would react," she said. "Then when I told him he just looked at me and asked if there was anything else he needed to know."

The couple married last June. Steven remains negative for HIV.

## Her Voice, Her Purpose

Amidst the struggles of the past five years, Howell has learned a lot about HIV that she now shares with others.

"It was meant for me to go public," she said. "Now I have a voice."

That voice was found when she agreed to her first media interview shortly after that pivotal Sunday when she announced her status. She posted the interview announcement and her HIV diagnosis on Facebook and it took off from there. Today she has participated in multiple interviews and presentations to educate others about HIV, written an autobiography, and been in two documentaries on living with the disease.

"I want people to know it's not a death sentence," she said. "I want them to know they can live a normal life."

That's why she established Monique's Hope for Cure Outreach Services last November in Holly Hill. The center strives to improve the quality of lives through HIV/Aids awareness and emergency assistance. They also provide food, clothing, sexually transmitted disease and HIV testing in this poor rural area.

"God sometimes allows things to happen for a reason," she added. "HIV does not define who I am. It is just an unfortunate part of me. I am a woman with a purpose in my life."



# BE BRAVE AGAIN...



Why you should get tested for HIV



**By Laura Lythgoe, Public Affairs Specialist**

Have you ever been tested for HIV? Did you know VA has the largest program in the nation for treatment of Human Immunodeficiency Virus? That's right! And that is especially important since approximately one in every 250 Veterans is living with HIV.

The problem is, about one-third of the total Veteran population has never been tested and could be living undiagnosed and possibly spreading the disease.

Having HIV is no longer the death sentence it was 30 years ago. Many new medications have become available to prevent HIV from developing into Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center carries every medication necessary to stave off AIDS and help Veterans with HIV live long, fulfilling, mostly regular lives. The best part - the co-pay for these costly medications is the same as an aspirin at the VA.

There are several major health problems associated with undiagnosed HIV. Blindness from Cytomegalovirus retinitis can occur. CMV retinitis is a herpes-type virus that attacks the retina of the eye. Another life-threatening possibility of unknowingly living with HIV is contracting cryptococcal meningitis. People with weakened immune systems are more susceptible to this disease that infects the lining of the spinal cord and brain, and can cause coma or death. Women are also more likely to get cervical cancer if they are living unknowingly with HIV. Even a regular cold or flu can become deadly.

HIV positive Veterans treated at the VA are immediately placed into a priority group and given extra attention to determine treatment options available once diagnosed. Dr. Anne Rahtjen, Infectious Disease Clinical Pharmacy Specialist, said she works with each Veteran to ensure they get the right medication for their lifestyle.

"The most important part of treatment is figuring out a way to make it easy for each patient to take their medications," said Rahtjen. "We sit down together and determine when he or she has regular meals, sleeps, works, and what other health conditions may impact the drug regimen necessary to gain success through the program.

"If you can fit these medications into the Veteran's normal life, rather than cause them grief trying to figure out their lives around the drugs, they are more likely to remain healthy and on track," she said.

Rahtjen also said the medications are the key to living a normal life with HIV. Drugs help the body create more new CD4 cells to keep the virus from taking over. CD4 cells or T-cells are the body's first responder when it comes to fighting off bacteria or other viruses.

The Web has a variety of resources available to learn more about HIV and AIDS. For more information visit [www.hiv.va.gov](http://www.hiv.va.gov) or <http://aids.gov>.



## HIV Testing

### Who should get an HIV test?

Public health experts recommend all adults get tested for HIV as part of their routine medical care.

### Why should I get an HIV test?

- An HIV test is the only way to be certain about your HIV status.
- A person with HIV could show no symptoms for years, but could still pass the virus on to others.
- It is better to diagnose and treat HIV early rather than late.
- There have been many advances in the treatment of HIV. People with HIV often live much longer and healthier lives than before.
- The earlier HIV is detected, the sooner a person can receive excellent care provided by VA and begin taking steps to remain healthy for years to come.

### What does the test involve?

- HIV testing within VA is voluntary and confidential.
- You will be given education materials on HIV and HIV testing. VA encourages you to ask your provider any questions you may have.
- If you give consent to be tested, an HIV test will be done with either a sample of blood or fluid (saliva) from inside your mouth.

**Remember, the most important part of treatment is knowing your status. Get tested.**



5th Annual  
*Welcome*  
**HOME**  
set for May 17



*Veterans talk with potential employers at Welcome Home.*



*Employers at the job fair get set up for Welcome Home.*

## Veterans invited, Volunteers needed

**By Kevin S. Abel, Public Affairs Specialist**

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center along with partner South Carolina Department of Employment and Work Force will host its fifth annual Welcome Home event for all Veterans, active duty service members and their families aboard the USS Yorktown May 17 from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

The free event features a job fair with over 85 employers, and a VA health and benefits fair to provide onsite enrollment and information to Veterans and their families. The job fair offers a great opportunity for Veterans to meet potential employers such as Google, SPAWAR, defense contractors, federal, state and local organizations. Veterans and their families will also enjoy free tours of the USS Yorktown.

"Our Welcome Home is an excellent opportunity for the VA and the community to thank all of our Veterans for serving their country and welcome home our returning service members," said Scott Isaacks, acting director of the Ralph H. Johnson VAMC.

In 2011 more than 260 Veterans participated in the

**Photos by Chris Baroody**

event along with an unprecedented 75 employers, area college representatives and community organizations from around the Lowcountry offering information about job and education opportunities. The VA health and benefits fair offers onsite enrollment, health screenings and information on topics like post traumatic stress and women's health.

The event, which reflects VA's commitment to our nation's heroes and their families, involves over 100 volunteers and donations from numerous organizations to ensure its success. All Veterans and their families are invited and service and community organizations are encouraged to support the event through donations or volunteering.

To donate or volunteer for  
Welcome Home call (843) 789-7230  
or email [vhachavavs@va.gov](mailto:vhachavavs@va.gov).





# MILLION

## Veteran Program

*Veteran blood samples are helping  
create a genetic database for  
research on Veteran health issues.*

**By Lisa Nashton, Administrative Fellow**

The Million Veteran Program (MVP) is a nationwide VA initiative to recruit one million Veterans to help create a database for genetic and health information to be used in research studies to improve health care for Veterans. Participation in MVP is entirely voluntary and Veteran's health information is treated in a very secure and confidential manner using state of the art encryption technology.

The purpose of creating this database is to help find genetic causes for diseases and to predict who will develop a disease and how better to treat that disease. One unique aspect for the Veteran population is to look at associations between genetics, combat and military service exposure and certain diseases such as Huntington's chorea, diabetes, drug addiction and alcoholism.

Currently MVP allows for ongoing assessment through the medical records. Access to the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) allows for identification of a Veteran using his or her genetic profile. Genetics do not change over time, but what may change is the course of an illness and other symptoms or diseases that develop during the course of the illness. The VA is unique in having CPRS so that as long as a Veteran is receiving treatment within the VA, then they have medical records and this information is available.

As of January 2012, over 510 Veterans have enrolled in MVP. Enrolling Veterans in MVP is a high priority for the VA nationally. The first Veteran to enroll and provide a genetic sample was Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki.

### There are three components to enrollment in MVP:

- A blood sample from the Veteran for genetic analysis
- Access to the Veteran's medical record
- A brief health survey answered by the Veteran

Veterans have the ability to opt out of the program at any time. If a Veteran decides that they want to opt out a year from now or 10 years from now, he or she can sign a letter to request to be removed from the study.

If you are a Veteran and would like to participate in MVP, please stop by the MVP clinic on the 2nd floor in room B249 or ask your Primary Care provider. You can also read more information at: [www.research.va.gov/mvp](http://www.research.va.gov/mvp)



# Your policy

helps insure more Veterans get health care

**By Kevin S. Abel, Public Affairs Specialist**

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center bills private health insurance companies for non service-connected care for two reasons – it's the law and these insurance dollars help provide health care for other Veterans.

“We bill insurance for non-service connected conditions,” said Carol Howell, Charleston VAMC’s revenue manager. “Insurance payments collected remain local and go back into the medical center to fund upgrades to medical equipment.” Funds also allow more Veterans to be treated at the facility according to Howell, who added she anticipates collecting \$23.1 million in insurance payments in fiscal year 2012. That equates to about 5,000 more Veterans that could be seen at the VA.

All Veterans who receive VA medical care are required to provide information on their health insurance coverage, including coverage provided under policies of their spouses. Insurance will only be billed for non-service connected care. VA also accepts TRICARE, but does not bill Medicare or Medicaid. Veterans should bring their insurance card with them for their appointments and present it during check-in.

You will NOT be responsible for any unpaid balance that the insurance carrier does not pay except for VA co-payment.

Payments from your private health insurance carrier may allow us to offset part or all of your co-payment.

Many private health insurance companies will apply VA health care charges toward the satisfaction of your annual deductible.

Your insurance coverage or lack of insurance coverage does not determine your eligibility for treatment at a VA health care facility.

Most non-service connected Veterans are required to complete an annual financial assessment called Financial Assessment (Means Test). A financial assessment consists of your family’s income and assets including your spouse’s income. If your income and assets fall below the income thresholds you will not be charged a co-payment for medical treatment, but VA will bill your insurance carrier for your non-service connected care. You may also be responsible for medication or extended care co-payments.



# VA2K Walk & Roll

keeps staff fit, helps homeless Veterans



Photo by Chris Baroody

## By Kevin S. Abel, Public Affairs Specialist

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center will join VA facilities across the nation to hold VA2K Walk and Roll events May 16 for wellness and in support of homeless Veterans.

The VA2K is an easy two-kilometer distance designed for employees at all levels of fitness. Most participants can complete it during a 30-minute lunch break. Employees and volunteers participating in the event are asked to donate an item for a homeless Veteran that includes:

- Coats
- Clothing
- Underwear
- Toiletry items
- Boots/shoes
- Blankets
- Gift cards

Non-employee Veterans may participate in this event but are not required to donate an item.

Last year's VA2K events on June 2, 2011 were hugely successful. One hundred fifty five sites, including 145 medical facilities and clinics took part. All 21 VISNs and 45 states (including Alaska and Hawaii) were represented. A total of 16,847 employees, Veterans and community members donated over 25,935 items for homeless Veterans valued at approximately \$172,000.

According to Tammy Gray, RN and VA2K committee chairwoman, more than 200 employees, Veterans and family members donated items for the homeless and walked in a blistering 90-degree heat in the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center VA2K Walk and Roll last June as part of VA-wide support of employee wellness month.

VA employees,  
volunteers and family  
members of all ages  
participate in the annual  
VA2K Walk and Roll.



Online  
My Health, My Care: 24/7 Access to VA

## New Features on My HealtheVet

### By Kevin S. Abel, Public Affairs Specialist

My HealtheVet ([www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)) is VA's award-winning online personal health record for Veterans, active duty Service members, their dependents, and caregivers.

New features including secure messaging which allows Veteran patients to exchange electronic messages with their healthcare team, and Blue Button which lets you download your personal health information and translates military experience into civilian job experience are now available.

To register, go to [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) and follow the directions. Users can record and track health information and history for their family and themselves; enter past and present military service events; keep activity and food journals; record, track, and graph vital signs; and, maintain other health measures.

To access the advanced features of My HealtheVet Veterans must complete a one-time process called In-Person Authentication or IPA. This includes making a visit to their VA facility to verify their identity in person. After completing the IPA, VA patients can use My HealtheVet to:

- Refill their VA prescriptions by name, not just by the prescription number
- Receive VA Wellness Reminders
- Access new features, like Secure Messaging and Blue Button, as they become available

If you have any questions or need help, please contact:  
Heather Friesen, Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center  
My HealtheVet coordinator at (843) 789-6504.







Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center  
109 Bee Street  
Charleston, SC 29401

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## IMPORTANT VA PHONE NUMBERS

### Charleston VA Medical Center

843-577-5011 or toll free 1-888-878-6884 or TTY: 843-789-6888

### Telephone Advice Line

843-789-6400 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884

Veterans who need medical advice from their Primary Care provider or have questions about their medications can call the TAP line Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

### Scheduling an Appointment

843-789-6500 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884

Veterans who need to schedule, cancel or reschedule an appointment for all Primary Care Clinics including Myrtle Beach, Savannah, Beaufort, Trident and Goose Creek can call Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

### Automated Prescription Refill Line

843-577-5011 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884

Veterans who need to request a refill of a prescription or check the status of refills can call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Have your social security number and prescription numbers ready when calling.

### VA Benefits (other than health care)

1-800-827-1000

Veterans who need information on VA benefits including VA pension and compensation, home loans, and education can call the VA Regional Office.

### Billing Questions

1-866-258-2772

Veterans who have questions about a bill received from the Charleston VA Medical Center can call the VA Revenue Center.

### Suicide Prevention

1-800-273-TALK (8255) Press 1 for Veterans

Veterans can call the VA Suicide Prevention Lifeline to talk to trained professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week or visit [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

### My HealtheVet

[www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)

Veterans can manage their health by logging onto My HealtheVet, which offers access to Veteran health benefits and services.

For more information on VA related topics visit [www.charleston.va.gov](http://www.charleston.va.gov). Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

